

The event I am referring to is known as the "Burning of the Columbia Wrightsville Bridge." Occurring on June 28, 1863, just 72 hours before the Battle of Gettysburg, this catastrophic event did not just destroy an ordinary bridge—it destroyed an extraordinary bridge. Completed in 1834 at a cost of \$128,726.50, it was the longest covered wooden bridge in the world, 40 feet wide with 27 piers, it spanned 5,620 feet across the Susquehanna River.

Ironically, this event and its impact on the region have lived in the shadow of the Battle of Gettysburg. Historians may debate whether or not this event had any impact on the Battle of Gettysburg. There is however, no denying the significant impact it had on preserving the loss of personal property throughout the region as evidenced by the following statement made by Colonel Jacob G. Frick, the man who gave the order to destroy the bridge. "The object to be kept in view, and which was paramount, was the prevention of the enemy from capturing the bridge, and thus frustrate them in their evident purpose to cross the Susquehanna at that point, get in the rear of Harrisburg, and between that place and Philadelphia destroy railroads and ravage the rich counties of Dauphin and Lancaster."

In order to fully understand the importance of this bridge and the town of Columbia, one must first examine conditions as they were in 1863 not as they may be today. First, how many of you are aware that the first place to be considered as the nation's capital was Columbia, Pennsylvania? It was an important travel artery for westward expansion, at times Conestoga Wagons would have to wait several days for their turn to cross the bridge. Railroads including the Philadelphia and Columbia, the Pennsylvania, and the Reading and Columbia all converged along the banks of the Susquehanna at Columbia.

These trains would either cross over the bridge to connect with the Susquehanna & Baltimore Railroad or transfer their cargo to packet boats that then traveled Westward via the Union Canal through the interior of Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh or where pulled by mules across the river via a towpath constructed on the side of the bridge to the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal that connected Columbia with the Chesapeake Bay and beyond. Columbia being at the epicenter of this vital transportation network made it a logical destination for industries consisting of iron furnaces, rolling mills, saw mills, flour mills, and railroad machine shops that were supplying goods to a growing nation. Columbia's strategic position would have made it a fine prize indeed for any invading Southern army bent on disrupting vital communications and supply lines in the North.

Colonel Frick made this statement in a letter from 1892: "I was fully impressed with the belief at the time that this bridge was General Lee's objective point, and that it was to become the highway of the Confederate army to reach the centers which enabled the Northern army to maintain its position in the field by cutting off the supplies by capturing the eastern ports and plant the seat of war in Pennsylvania instead of Virginia."

In a letter received by Colonel Frick from Major Granville O. Haller, dated Seattle, April 28, 1892, says that he and Col. Thomas M. Anderson, commanding Fourteenth United States Infantry, had been discussing the burning of the bridge, Colonel Anderson wrote to Major Haller March 30, 1892, as follows:

All theories apart, I should say that it would have been better to have burned twenty bridges than to have taken any chances. If the burning of the bridge stopped Gordon, it was as important as a battle.

On the 10th of April Major Haller sent a letter that was submitted to Colonel Frick in February 1892 from General John B. Gordon, admitting to Colonel Frick that without question his order to destroy the bridge stopped him and his troops from crossing, to Colonel Anderson. Colonel Anderson accepted it as conclusive evidence of Lee's intention, and thus confirmed in his opinion as to the importance of burning the bridge.

Who other than God of battles would know until the afternoon of July 3, whether Meade or Lee would be victor?

If Meade, then the enemy would be driven from our border. If Lee then the seat of war would have located itself between the Susquehanna and the Delaware and the Hudson. The Columbia Bridge would have become the Confederate highway to Lancaster, Philadelphia, and New York. In their onward march an army of veterans would have met with no fortified towns or cities; a practically unarmed and undisciplined militia, and a panic-stricken community in its front and a broken army sullenly following far in its rear; who can tell what awful results would have been had Lee been victorious at Gettysburg, yet who knew that he would not be until July 3, 1863?

Now for some particulars on the chain of events that led up to the burning and what transpired after that event.

On June 10, 1863 the Department of the Susquehanna was created under the control of General Couch to protect the area. Notices were put out for volunteers to serve. By June 24, 1863 it became apparent to General Couch a unit of approximately 2,500 veteran soldiers continued Eastbound to gain control of a bridge across the Susquehanna River between the towns of Columbia and Wrightsville.

On June 24, 1863, General Couch under special order #14, ordered Colonel Frick to proceed to Columbia and take charge of all bridges and fords on the line of the Susquehanna River in Lancaster County, and will make such dispositions as will effectively secure these crossings.

Colonel Frick: "My duty in the premises was plain. Gen. Couch plainly indicated my duty in his orders, wherein he said: "When you find it necessary to withdraw your command from Wrightsville leave a proper number on the other side to destroy the bridge; keep it open as long as possible with prudence and exercise your own discretion in doing so."

It must be remembered as we look at this dramatic and critical event in retrospect, that as a result of this most necessary and important cutting of the available crossing of the river at the time of the invasion, a private corporation suffered a loss of property of the first magnitude. So evident was the effect of its destruction in the public mind, that we find the following statement in the Lancaster Examiner and Herald of July 8, 1863, but ten days following the event:

The burning of the bridge which spanned the Susquehanna River at Columbia, has given rise to a rumor that its loss would have the effect of impairing the credit of the Columbia Bank. This now seems will not be the case, as the structure was destroyed by order of the military authorities, thus making the Government responsible for all loss. The following note from the Cashier of the

Columbia Bank fully explains the circumstances.

June 29, 1863. Dear Sir, The bridge at this place, owned by the Columbia Bank, was burned by the United States Military authorities to prevent the Rebels from crossing the Susquehanna River.—Signed Samuel Schock, Cashier.

It was not until 1868 that construction of a new bridge was started.

Today the only remnants of this piece of history are the stone piers still standing in the River and the story of the bridge and its destruction being told by Michael and Nora Stark, owners of the little known, but highly significant First National Bank Museum. If it were not for this museum, this important piece of American history would certainly be lost forever.

HONORING THE WILMA RUDOLPH STAMP

HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 2004

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor the new Wilma Rudolph stamp that is now being issued by the U.S. Postal Service.

Wilma Rudolph was a native of Clarksville, Tennessee and an Olympic gold medalist. As a child, she battled polio; and she won. This was just one of her many "wins." At the 1960 Olympic games, she won three gold medals in track and field, a truly amazing feat—especially for one who'd been afflicted by polio. In 1983, she was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame.

I thank Mayor Don Trotter and Clarksville Postmaster Wayne Scott for submitting Wilma's name for consideration for this honor.

This stamp is a fitting reminder of her accomplishments, and I know that many Tennesseans will be purchasing her stamp when it is released in her old neighborhood of St. Bethlehem.

IN HONOR OF THE 100 MONTHS OF OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER SERVICE FROM "FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAKE"

HON. PETE SESSIONS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 2004

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the "For the Love of the Lake" organization that has played a crucial role in the preservation of White Rock Lake in Dallas. "For the Love of the Lake" is a volunteer organization that leads the conservation efforts at White Rock Lake. I am proud to be associated with this organization for more than 8 years as an Adopt a Shore Leader, as it brings together many people from the community to come together for a common cause in keeping our "White Rock Lake as the crown jewel of Dallas."

I joined with the outpouring of community support this past Saturday, July 10, 2004, as we celebrated the last 100 months before starting our normal routine of cleaning up the